

“An impassioned, eloquent work of heart, soul and graceful erudition by a writer of genius.”

—Carol Bruneau, author of *Brighten the Corner Where You Are: A novel inspired by the life of Maud Lewis*

Purposeful Memoir

as a **Quest** for a **Thriving Future**

Inspiration for **Writers & Seekers**

Images & Text by

Jennifer Browdy, PhD

This book is a gift, truly medicine for writers and all lovers of life in this ailing world. Weaving lyrical language with a voice that's welcoming and deeply trustworthy, we're warmly welcomed into a path of knitting memoir with our yearning for helping to create a healthier and more vital world. Punctuated with the most exquisite photographs, Jennifer Browdy's love of nature's beauty itself is inspiring, even breathtaking.

But this is far more than an inspiring book about memoir, it's a practical how-to guide to overcoming the personal bashfulness that so many of us have, and elevating the art of memoir to its true, deeply relevant and culture-shifting form of activist art. For anyone who's ever yearned to write, but wondered whether their voice is too personal or their world too small, this book will soothe those naysaying voices, as it consistently conveys in the most accessible way how the personal IS what's most political.

This is a book to savor, to practice with, to carry on your journey and to share with friends, written with the passion of a life of deep dedication to writing as an act of loving service, activism and leadership.

—Nina Simons, Co-founder and Chief Relationship Officer, Bioneers, and author of *Nature, Culture & the Sacred: A Woman Listens for Leadership*

A work of radical generosity, Jennifer Browdy's *Purposeful Memoir as Quest for a Thriving Future* is a balm for us all in these troubled times. This visionary guide to writing and being is food for the spirit, demonstrating how through channeling the creative mind we can be our best selves and act now to heal our ailing planet.

An impassioned, eloquent work of heart, soul and graceful erudition by a writer of genius.

—Carol Bruneau, author of *Brighten the Corner Where You Are: A novel inspired by the life of Maud Lewis*

Jennifer Browdy offers us an overflowing cornucopia of prompts, images and questions, designed to take you into your great storehouse of memories. Pick one and follow its thread into the deep spaces of your inner landscape. It will lead you to your very heart center, and there you will discover your life purpose, your essential values, and the abiding energy you will need to bring it all into your world. It is the path of healing, gloriously reflected in her stunning photographs—healing yourself, your community and the world.

—Penny Gill, author of *What in the World is Going On? Wisdom Teachings for Our Time*

What a challenge! Exciting and inviting, this deceptively small book will provide lifetimes of revelation for anyone who follows the writing prompts in depth. I appreciate its emphasis on positive re-imagining even of experiences that might have seemed troublesome on first remembrance. Jennifer Browdy has a great talent for making sure we don't wallow in past troubles, but instead use those learning experiences as springboards: seeing them in a new light will help us make a useful contribution to a world much in need of our encouragement.

Also a superb photographer, Jennifer has included stunning images that capture each Quest theme beautifully. And the stories of many inspiring poets and activists (as she has titled them, Worldwrights) offer us powerful examples to follow in seeking to make our own lights shine.

—Janet Maybee, author of *Aftershock: The Halifax Explosion and the Persecution of Pilot Francis Mackey*

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Inspiration for Writers & Seekers

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For the worldwrights in whose steps I follow...
and for those who will come after.



Contents

Introduction: Embarking on the Quest	1
Questing for a Thriving Future	1
The Alchemy of Purposeful Memoir	4
The Archeology of Purposeful Memoir	7
Aligning the Personal, Political and Planetary for a Thriving Future	10
The Worldwrights Lead the Way	13
Purposeful Memoir as a Contemplative Practice: Techniques and Approaches . . .	16
Embarking on the Quests	22
THE QUESTS	
Quest 1: Seeking Clarity	25
Quest 2: Seeking Courage	35
Quest 3: Seeking Vitality	46
Quest 4: Seeking Guidance	53
Quest 5: Seeking Love	61
Quest 6: Seeking Community	70
Quest 7: Seeking Joy	80
Quest 8: Seeking Freedom	88
Conclusion: Becoming Worldwrights: Spiral Paths To A Thriving Future	97



Introduction: Embarking on the Quest

Questing for a Thriving Future

The year 2020 crashed into the world like a huge tidal wave, knocking everything off its foundations. We were all roiled by the turbulence, forced to bow to a microscopic virus, swept along by events beyond our control. And yet this book is born of my conviction that even though there is much we cannot control about our daily lives, we humans do have the power to change the world with our vision, our understanding, and the choices we make day by day. How you live, what you do, and who you are matters; the ripples from each of us individuals go out to affect others in ever-widening circles. At this moment in history, we humans are developing a true “hive mind” through our technological exo-brain, the Internet. We have the capacity to connect with and influence others to a degree never before seen, and we are visible to each other, worldwide, as never before—even when we are stuck in our homes for days and weeks on end.

The pandemic showed us how we are literally connected to each other, and all other life on Earth, through the air we breathe—and how the fact of our interconnection has the capacity to shift the way we live, the reality we wake up to each morning. We are also connected through our shared imaginal reality: ideas, too, can go viral. The 21st century is calling us to a greater awareness of how we interact with the world around us, both in

terms of our physical bodies, and in terms of our ideas. To create the thriving future we all desire, we have to become more discerning of what we put into our bodies, as well as into the larger body of the Earth around us; and more discerning of what ideas we consume and let fly into the collective consciousness around us.

To become a more mindful denizen of planet Earth, we need to understand more fully *how we got here*, as individuals and communities inhabiting specific places on this planet alongside myriad other Gaians, from bacteria and viruses on up to the insects, plants and animals we can see around us. This is where the practice of purposeful memoir comes in. I see it as an intentional use of the power of personal narrative to align the personal, political and planetary threads of our existence with the goal of creating a strong, resilient springboard into a more vibrant and healthy future, for each of us individuals and for human civilization in its relation to the planet. Through the practice of purposeful memoir, you gain a deeper understanding of your own power to transform your life—and the world around you—for the better, through the choices you make each day.



The Alchemy of Purposeful Memoir

This book is an invitation to you to embark on a unique journey into the past, one that remains grounded in the present moment while also opening new portals for visionary forays into the future. The journey is organized as a series of quests that begin from the exploration of *positive* moments from your life story. This is a rather big departure from the dominant trend in memoir writing, which has been influenced by the modern therapy movement to focus on moments of trauma and suffering: the memoirist takes us on a journey into their painful past, and then—we hope—leads us through their ultimately successful process of recovery. In contrast, the practice of purposeful memoir starts by seeking out moments in our life history that glimmer with the *positive* qualities that we want *more of* in our lives. Instead of starting with a moment of fear, for example, we start with a moment of joy; instead of beginning from loneliness, we begin with community, and so on.

This is not a form of denial; the practice of purposeful memoir also leads us into explorations of fear, loneliness and all those other difficult, painful moments in our life stories. But the deliberate foregrounding of the positive sets these negative moments into a less all-consuming light. When I decided to flip the script in my purposeful memoir workshops and invite participants to start with positive memories from their life stories, rather than automatically going to the moments of trauma, it was like a dark cloud suddenly parted, allowing the rays of sunshine to beam through. In those same sessions, we also wrote about the negative moments, but having started from the positive, these could be viewed in a more balanced light.

This simple shift can have a big impact. Contemporary Westerners spend an inordinate amount of time focused on the negative: our media and pop culture feed us an endless diet of personal, societal and environmental disasters, with the result that we are plagued by anxiety and depression as never before. This does no one any good, and on a large scale it puts a damper on the kind of positive visionary thinking we need to get us through the rapids of this dangerous moment in history, to a brighter, calmer, saner relationship with ourselves, each other and the world.

To activate the positive visionary in each of us, I have developed a technique that I call *alchemical writing*. Alchemy is the ancient practice of transformation, both literal (chemistry) and metaphorical (magic). In the context of purposeful memoir, practicing alchemical writing means giving yourself permission to deploy your creative imagination in a visionary re-writing of key moments of your life story. On a personal level, this might mean taking one of those traumatic scenes from your past and allowing yourself to playfully rewrite it, bringing that moment to a happier conclusion. Instead of endlessly ruminating about how you didn't say what you should have said in that oh-so-memorable argument, for example, you go ahead and rewrite the whole scene with the words you wish you'd had at the time. While we can't change history, we can change how we view it, and I've found that when people try working the magic of alchemical writing on their life story, they come away amazed and inspired by the sense of transformative power and liberation it brings to the present moment of writing. From that more empowered present moment, we can set out to write our way towards a more positive future.



The Archeology of Purposeful Memoir

Each of us alive today has experienced directly or been a bystander to tremendous pain and suffering, not only on an individual level but also as a result of the damaging social structures that we were born into. It has been important, these past 50 years or so, to let the stories of trauma out into the collective awareness, to finally reckon with the depth of suffering that has been inflicted by the racist colonialist capitalist scientific patriarchy in these past 500 years. But we need to be purposeful in our reliving of the traumas of the past through present-day storytelling. The Quests in this book seek to transform the darkness of pain into the diamond of resilience through the alchemical vessel of purposeful memoir. If we dare to enter a difficult, traumatic vein of personal, societal or environmental history, it is with the intention of coming to a deeper understanding of its legacy on the present, and distilling whatever positive life lessons that dark historical passage may hold for the brighter future we seek to co-create and live into with others.

For this aspect of purposeful memoir, I have developed a technique I call “*archeological exploration*,” in which we sift through the deeper layers of memory, history and geography, looking for more information about the legacies we carry from our ancestors and their life experiences. In part this borrows from recent developments in the new science of epigenetics, which holds that searing experiences, especially from early childhood, can affect our genes and be passed on to future generations. If your ancestor went through a traumatic experience (for example, the Irish potato famine, the Holocaust,

incest) it is possible that their response to it lives on in you, both physiologically and psychologically.

On a broader social level, all of us are affected by the society-wide traumas our ancestors lived through or witnessed. The effects of historical cruelties like the Inquisition, colonization, slavery, misogyny, racism—the list goes on—are still reverberating in each of us, in ways we don't always realize. And then there are the environmental crises to which all of us alive today have borne witness, whether or not we fully apprehended what we were seeing: the heating of the atmosphere, the acidification of the oceans, the degradation of the natural world and all the suffering these environmental disruptions have caused, starting with that huge slow-motion catastrophe, the sixth great extinction of species. The grief of these immense losses tolls daily like a solemn bell in my psyche; you may be hearing it too.

In the archeological exploration of purposeful memoir, it's important that we take the time to connect with the ancestors on whose shoulders we stand, discerning which of their worldviews and attitudes we want to jettison as no longer valid or useful, and which we want to carry with us as essential legacies for the future. Saluting the positive and transmuting the negative, we begin to transform our understanding of our own stories, as well as the grander collective story we all weave together as we move through life. Our aim on these Quests is always to use the transformative practice of purposeful memoir as a bridge towards the thriving future we desire, not only for ourselves but for the entire Earth community of which we are an integral part.



Aligning the Personal, Political and Planetary for a Thriving Future

Buddhist philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh taught that if you look closely, you can see the whole world in your cup of tea. Similarly, if you view your life with the intent of aligning the *personal, political and planetary* axes of your experience, it quickly becomes clear that you are far more than just your individual self. Each of us stands in the center of a network of multiple overlapping social groups that play a large—if not always fully obvious—role in determining who we are, how we behave, and how we perceive the world around us. We are also, whether we realize it or not, each a member of the Earth community, the vast ecological web of life on Gaia, our living planet Earth.

Through taking fuller stock of your unique place and role as a member of human society and the larger Gaian community, exploring all the multiple facets of your identity in this time and place, you develop a richer, more nuanced self-understanding. You begin to create a contoured, layered map of the landscape of your life experience, with a timeline that highlights not only the most important places, people and events in your personal life, but also in your experience as a member of multiple social groups and a denizen of various planetary locations.

In these early years of the 21st century, long trends that have been unfolding over the past 5,000 years are rapidly accelerating and coming to climax. In the brief lifespans of everyone alive on Earth today, we are seeing

systemic and local changes that in any previous era would have taken ages to unfold. It appears that we are in the middle of a political and environmental pressure-cooker moment of evolutionary significance. We are being pushed to evolve quickly, or risk civilizational collapse.

What does this *feel* like, on an individual level, for those of us who are at least somewhat aware of what is happening, and what is at stake? That is how the planetary gets personal—and political too, since our social groups often impact how we feel about what we perceive in the world around us. To paraphrase and reimagine Margaret Mead’s famous saying: never doubt that a few committed individuals, fully cognizant of our multiple overlapping personal, political and planetary roles and responsibilities, can change the world. Indeed, we can, we must, and we will—one memory, one word, one light bulb moment of revelation at a time.



The Worldwrights Lead the Way

For many years, I have been following the writings of a group of change agents I call *worldwrights*, a term I coined taking off from the word playwright: playwrights write plays, worldwrights write to right the world, their writing itself becoming a tool of positive personal and social change. Out of the vast tribe of worldwrights, I will be sharing a select group with you in the context of this book: worldwrights from the 20th or 21st centuries, who have both succeeded in manifesting their visions for positive change in the world *and* have written purposeful memoirs about their lifework. Their trailblazing stories serve as beacons lighting the path for the rest of us coming along behind them.

On each of the eight Quests in this book, I'll be sharing stories of some of the worldwrights who have most inspired me. Each one started as we all do, in a childhood that was easy or challenging; made their way through the rapids of adolescence with grace or with sputtering; passed through the fires of grand passions and searing experiences; and spent time in the airy space of reflection and meditation. In reading their memoirs, I look for those key choice points, those moments when, in their individual quests for a thriving future, they made decisions that not only benefited them personally, but also had a larger impact on those around them and on the shared reality we call "the world." From their stories we can learn to develop a keener awareness of the crossroads that arise in our own life journeys, and how to make choices that will lead us down a path that will ultimately be positive and productive, even though it will undoubtedly have its perils. The worldwrights I'll be

sharing with you in this book model courage under pressure and a focused determination to make the world better for all, along with an openness to admitting their own vulnerabilities and fears.

It is my firm conviction that each of us has the capacity to become a worldwright in our own sphere. The journey of this book is designed to give you a firmer footing on the ground of your own life story, from which to launch your own quest to make a positive impact on the world around you.



Purposeful Memoir as a Contemplative Practice: Techniques and Approaches

Purposeful memoir is valuable whether or not you intend to ultimately create and share your memoir with others. It is a contemplative journey, a steady practice of inquiry that will lead you to a deeper understanding of your life in relation to the larger social, historical and planetary context in which you and your ancestors lived. It is an offering to the future, a practice of writing that builds on a visionary understanding of the past as the scaffolding upon which we construct in the present, moment by moment, the future we desire.

As I practice it, purposeful memoir calls for a radical honesty that includes the full spectrum of experience, including dreams and fantasies, intuition and inner guidance. Writing from the heart, in short passionate bursts, we free ourselves to become channels for the wisdom that seeks to come through us. We slip past the rigid academic censors that guard the well-fortified conventional gates between fact and fiction, rational thinking and dream/fantasy; we run lightly, laughing, into a sun-drenched dewy morning where the human is free again to embrace the more-than-human world, to take the full measure of her place as a beloved member of the Gaian community. Through the steady practice of purposeful memoir, we can and will build the thriving future for which we all yearn.

Though more structured and intentional than simple journaling, purposeful memoir shares with journaling a generative, freeform style of open-ended exploration. Each of the Quests in this book is accompanied

by writing prompts that I call catalysts, which invite deeper reflection about key moments in your individual and collective life journey. Setting out as an explorer, looking for the gold hidden away in the remote corners of your memories, you don't have to know in advance where you are going or what you hope to find. Just trust that if you remember something, it must be important, and focus on getting your first impressions of images, sensations and emotions down on the page. Later, if you wish, you can expand, revise and refine the scenes that come up for you through this liberating initial process.

In the context of each Quest, I will be discussing some of the practical techniques of purposeful memoir that I've developed in my years as a teacher and workshop leader. These include:

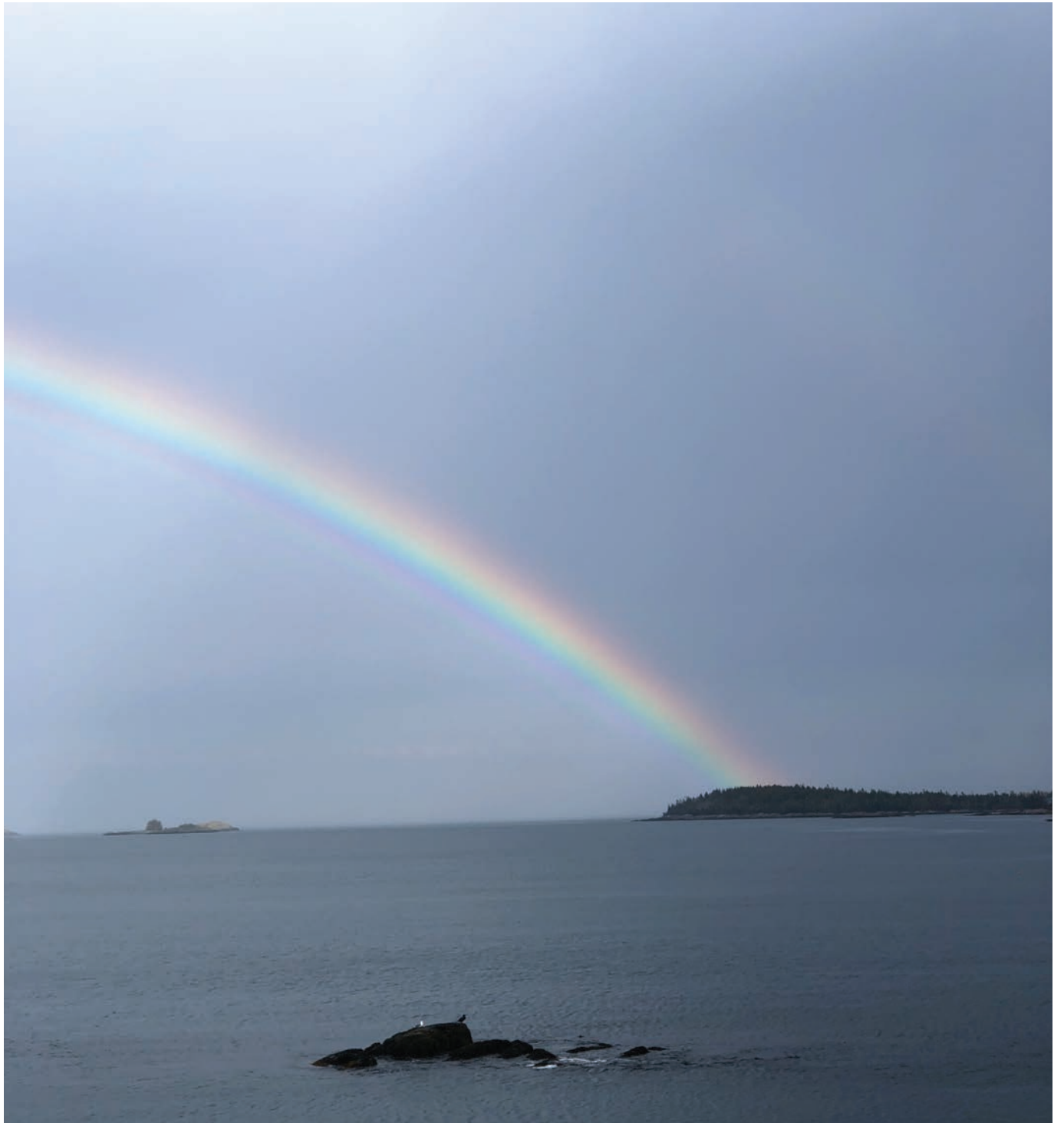
- *Lists*, a quick way to call up and organize memories from different stages of your life. These lists can be returned to again and again as seeds of the stories that have been important in shaping your life journey.
- *Scenes*, in which you develop particular moments from your past into full-fledged stories, using as much detail as possible and trying to get back into your point of view from that moment in your life.
- *Alchemical Writing*, in which we invoke our potential as visionaries by exploring the potent liminal space between *what was* and *what might have been*.

- *Archeological explorations*, the deeper dive into the historical scaffolding that underpins our individual life stories.
- *Reflections*, in which we process and integrate the lessons learned from the process of inquiry we've just undertaken.

Undergirding the Quests is my elemental journey framework for purposeful memoir, in which the four elements—Earth, Water, Fire and Air—serve as illuminating lenses through which to explore the spiral path of your life story.

- *Earth* represents Childhood, the ground of your being in this lifetime;
- *Water* represents the teenage/young adult years, when you enter the stream of your time and place and either go with the flow or begin to swim against the tide;
- *Fire* represents our passions as well as the trials and tribulations we all must live through;
- *Air* is the space of reflection, the bird's-eye vantage point from which we can survey our lives, map out patterns and make sense of it all.

This framework is useful not only for structuring your exploration of your own personal life story, but also for exploring the larger collective narratives of your time and place, as well as the lives and historical moments of your ancestors.



In my guide for purposeful memoirists, *The Elemental Journey of Purposeful Memoir: A Writer's Companion*, I offered writing catalyst prompts for each month, spiraling through the zodiac—which is also organized by Earth, Water, Fire and Air—in an open-ended consideration of different aspects of your life story, from childhood through the present, along personal, societal and planetary axes.

This book weaves the elemental journey framework into a new form of inquiry, providing signposts for a series of journeys that you can undertake on your own, perhaps accompanied by the expanded set of writing catalyst prompts included in the *Purposeful Memoir as a Quest for a Thriving Future* card deck. In both the book and the card deck, the photos provide their own invitation: use them as portals into a deeper meditation on your connection to our beautiful planet Earth.

My overarching aim is to provide thought-provoking, open-ended starting points, provocations and stimulations, rather than instructions; this is *your* journey and you can't get it wrong as long as you undertake your Quest with an open heart and the sincere intention to probe your life experience deeply and honestly through the medium of purposeful memoir.



Embarking on the Quests

The journey of purposeful memoir is not linear—far from it! Just as consciousness is multi-dimensional, moving us forward and backward in time at the speed of thought, the practice of purposeful memoir is best undertaken as a series of explorations, in which the direction of your Quest is guided by your intuition rather than by any pre-established goals.

As with a literal foray into unknown territory, without benefit of GPS or experienced guide, your exploration of the terrain of individual and collective memory is likely to turn up surprises. In fact, if your narrative journey is too tame or predictable, going back over familiar territory you've hashed out before, you can take that as a sign that you need to gird on your metaphorical sword and get more adventurous! Seek out the dragons in your life story, the damsels in distress, the tempting fairies and sirens of family legend. Gather your allies and go forth to meet your demons! Be open to surprises as you enter the ruined castles of your personal memory, as well as the larger edifices of history, built on the bedrock of specific geographical places.

Each of the eight Quests in this book beckons you to set your sights on a positive quality that you personally will need—and human society will collectively need—if we are to create a thriving future for ourselves and all of Gaia. Narrative is linear, so the Quest series begins with Clarity and ends with Freedom; along the way, Courage, Vitality, Guidance, Love, Community and Joy each open a portal into a new path of exploration. But you don't have to follow this order—you can embark on any Quest that draws you on a given day, or you can return repeatedly to one avenue of discovery, going

deeper into unknown territory each time you sit down to write, perhaps with the added provocations of the writing catalysts and photographs in the *Purposeful Memoir* card deck. You can also come up with additional positive qualities to quest for—there are so many possibilities, once you give yourself permission to begin to live into the thriving future that is glimmering before you, gleaming towers topped by colorful banners, rising out of the bright fog of the present moment.

Are you ready? Let's go!



Quest 1

SEEKING CLARITY

I sit down to write about “seeking clarity” on a supremely foggy morning, when the purple of the lupines is especially intense and the raindrops sit glistening on every leaf. This dense fog is like the *prima materia* of the alchemists, the marvelously creative matrix out of which just about anything could grow. It bears a striking resemblance to the blank white of my page, or yours: the open invitation to set forth, to make your mark.

On this Quest, we set out seeking clarity—about who we are; about the world we were born into; about what we are meant to be and to accomplish in this lifetime. Once we open up the floodgate of questions, they just keep coming, don't they? At some point, if you keep writing, you begin to call up those essential writer's questions: Why am I drawn to write? What do I have to say? How shall I say it? And for whom am I writing? If you sit with these questions long enough, an open, beckoning path will appear out of the unformed fog of dreams, hopes, fragments and mystery, and your purpose will suddenly become as clear as a ray of sunlight breaking through the clouds.

But let's acknowledge that even clearing the head space for this kind of reflection is not easy. We live in a time cluttered with distractions. It's also a time when people earn money by encouraging, if not downright seducing us

into becoming passive consumers rather than active creators. It can seem so much easier to watch the latest Netflix drama or read another mystery series, rather than tuning in to the whispers of your own creativity, and writing them down as best you can.

The mystery writers and the TV drama writers face this thicket of distraction too, but somehow they manage to focus anyway, and keep the sentences unfurling from their pens or cursors. Being paid to write is a good incentive, but all of us are hardwired for storytelling. We live each day like a drama (or sometimes a sit-com) in which we have the starring role. At night, we dream furiously, effortlessly moving through elaborate holographic scenes, weaving fantastic tales of our own imaginative devising. We are naturally creative creatures. So why is it often so hard for us to sit down at our desks and *just write*?

British worldwright Virginia Woolf famously said that women need “a room of their own” and a small but steady income in order to clear the creative space to write, and she was fortunate enough to have always had this luxury. In another time and place, Chicana worldwright Gloria Anzaldúa admonished her working class sisters to write anywhere—on the bus, on the toilet, on scraps of paper, whenever they could snatch a few moments to pursue their creative vision. This bears thinking about, for all of us—what are the material circumstances that enable us to write, or that get in our way? It’s not always true that having all the time in the world leads to productivity; deadlines can often be helpful. I remember doing some of my best writing when pressed for time, either up against a tight journalistic deadline, or writing in the early morning hours before my household awoke, or in the precious two afternoon hours when my baby went down for a nap. These

days, I have the luxury of more quiet time and space, yet it can be too easy to sink into indolence and the kind of apathy that comes from those perennial insecure questions: what do I have to offer? What difference can my writing make to the world? When I get into this kind of creative funk, I turn to worldwrights like Woolf and Anzaldúa, who are always able to snap me out of it and get me on my creative feet again.

When I first encountered Virginia Woolf in a college literature class, her unique way of “tunneling out behind” her characters was so intriguing to me that I ended up writing a 100-page B.A. thesis about her use of androgyny as a way of expressing the full human potential of her characters, and as a social ideal to which to aspire. Woolf was way ahead of her time in recognizing that gender is a spectrum, and that each of us, no matter the body into which we were born, has attributes that are stereotypically called “masculine”—like aggression, strength and fortitude—along with attributes that are stereotypically called “feminine,” like nurturing, empathy and connection. Woolf had uncommon clarity about the fact that we are a lot more complicated, as human beings, than conventional stereotypes allow.

Woolf is recognized today as a brilliant experimental literary stylist, but back in the early 1900s when she was writing her most famous novels, the British publishing world saw her writing as too weird to take a chance on. Rather than compromise one iota of her vision, Woolf, together with her husband Leonard, took the radical step of self-publishing. She and her husband started their own small publishing company, Hogarth Press, with a big old printing press in the basement of their home in Richmond, on the outskirts of London. They published all of Woolf’s novels, and the work of

their avant-garde friends as well, simply bypassing the crusty closed doors of the literary establishment of the time. Hogarth Press was my inspiration in the founding of Green Fire Press, the force behind the book you hold in your hands, and many others.

After years of struggling with her mental health, Woolf wrote about how her stepbrother had repeatedly molested her as an adolescent, an agonizing violation that undermined the creative buoyancy she had known as a young child, when she and her siblings would write and stage elaborate plays, and publish a wry weekly newsletter chronicling the doings of their large, active family. As a young adult, Woolf became anorexic and suffered long, debilitating bouts of depression, for which she was prescribed bed rest without books or writing utensils, another form of torture for a bright young woman.

Nevertheless, in her relatively short life she managed to produce an extensive body of work that opened new pathways for all of us younger writers coming up behind her. We are still catching up to the political ideas she expressed in her long essay *Three Guineas*, where she envisioned the founding of an “Outsider’s Society” that would work actively to end the tyranny of patriarchal capitalism, with its hostility toward women, its dehumanization of workers, and its glorification of war. In this text, Woolf flung open the doors of her quiet “room of her own” to proclaim: “As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world” (234).

This is a rallying cry that Gloria Anzaldúa picked up and extended in

her purposeful memoir *Borderlands/La frontera*, published in 1987 at the height of the late 20th century culture wars against feminism and multiculturalism. Written in Spanish, English and Nahuatl, in a deliberately fragmentary style moving from history to poetry to personal narrative on every page, *Borderlands* is a celebration of the power of the border as a space of radical possibility. Unlike Woolf, who grew up in an elite British family, Anzaldúa's life was a constant struggle for survival. Her father died at 38 of a heart attack brought on by overwork in the hot farm fields of south Texas. Anzaldúa describes how she was criticized by her family for resisting the traditional subservient role of the Chicana girl; how her creative talents went unrecognized by her Anglo teachers in her public schools, where Spanish was forbidden; and how she spent days each month in her own private hell, when her menstrual cycle arrived with debilitating cramps and splitting headaches. In *Borderlands*, she tells the story of her heroic struggle to find and claim her own voice and her own unique "*mestiza*" vision, seeking "an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian....And if going home is denied me," she proclaims, "then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and own feminist architecture" (44).

Neither Woolf nor Anzaldúa ended up living a full life. Woolf committed suicide in 1941 at age 59 by loading her pockets with stones and walking into the cold river near her house, as the savagery of World War II became unbearable for her. Anzaldúa died suddenly at age 61 of a diabetic stroke. True to her vision of the value of staying in the borderlands—her Chicana version of Woolf's "Outsider's Society"—Anzaldúa had always refused to

accept a university teaching position, and when she died there were regretful speculations that, in those pre-Obamacare days, her diabetes might have been better managed had she had health insurance.

I tell the stories of these two worldwrights to emphasize how deeply they struggled, every day of their lives—*and yet, they persisted*, to use the phrase made famous by contemporary feminist Elizabeth Warren. Somehow, despite their many physical and mental health challenges, despite the barriers and impediments they found in society as they matured, Woolf and Anzaldúa kept on writing and sharing their ideas, seeking always to find pathways into the thriving future they envisioned so clearly.

Creativity is the birthright of every human being, but it takes determination to persevere through the thicket of social mores, obligations and restrictions, to break through into that precious free space, marginal though it may be, where we can clearly articulate who we are and what we stand for. On this Quest, dare to envision yourself as just the kind of clear, centered, purposeful creator you need to be in order to thrive.



SEEKING CLARITY

Your Catalysts for Writing

On this Quest, start by making a list of specific moments in your life, from childhood through the present, when you have felt clear, relaxed and spacious.

Then choose a memory from the list and write the scene that goes with it, taking us with you into that moment of clarity. Be as detailed as you can in describing the place, what was going on, and how you felt in that moment.

Keep working with your list, writing scenes that take us with you into blessed moments of spaciousness and clarity. Stay with this stage of the Quest for as long as you like, turning the moments of clarity from your list into full-fledged, intriguing scenes.

Now try some alchemy! First, take us on a typical “day-in-the-life” journey for you, in your current life—let’s say last week. *Using third person*, describe yourself moving through your routines from the moment you wake up, right through the day, on a typical weekday. Notice where and how your moments of clarity come into your routine (or are conspicuously absent).

Next, turn to a fresh page and rewrite this typical day, this time giving us a vision of what a day in your life would look like if you could maintain a sense of clarity from the moment you woke up until you put yourself back to bed.

Write in the present tense, for maximum imaginative intensity. As you write it, you make it happen—at least on the page.

No Quest is complete without pause at the look-out into the future. As the fog lifts, gaze into the landscape of your future, and consider:

- If you were able to create more spaciousness in your life, what would you want to do with that precious time/space/clarity?
- What practical measures can you take, today or tomorrow, to clear the space to tap into your creativity and find your purpose in writing? In life?